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Wrestling with 9/11: Immigrant Perceptions and Perceptions of Immigrants

Caroline B. BRETTELL¹

Abstract

Soon after 9/11 a research project to study new immigration into the Dallas Fort Worth metropolitan area got under way. In the questionnaire that was administered to 600 immigrants across five different immigrant populations (Asian Indians, Vietnamese, Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Nigerians) between 2003 and 2005 we decided to include a question about the impact of 9/11 on their lives. We asked: "How has the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 affected your position as an immigrant in the United States?" This article analyzes the responses to this question, looking at similarities and differences across different immigrant populations. It also addresses the broader issue of how 9/11 has affected both immigration policy and attitudes toward the foreign-born in the United States.

Keywords: 9/11; United States; Dallas.

At 2:30 p.m. on September 11, 2001, an email from the President of the India Association of North Texas (IANT), located in Dallas, Texas, was distributed to all members of the organization. It announced a special candlelight vigil for the following evening at the India Association office to "show our support to the nation, condemn terrorists, and pray for the victims."

Approximately 200 people of Indian origin gathered at 7 p.m. on September 12. After the Pledge of Allegiance, the President-elect of the Association called for the Indian community to stand with the President of the United States and

¹ Caroline Brettell is Dedman Family Distinguished Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, USA. Email: cbrettel@smu.edu.

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with their fellow Americans against the terrible act of international terrorism. In his remarks, the President of IANT described India as a place where people had learned to get along with one another despite their incredible diversity of languages and religions. This, he said, is what he hoped for the world. Representatives from various religious communities followed these two speakers, offering prayers appropriate to their respective faiths. Small candles were distributed and lit. When the prayers and candlelight vigil had concluded the President stated that he planned to fast until \$25,000 was raised for the American Red Cross. Within 15 minutes about \$30,000 had been pledged. A few weeks later, at a gathering in Thanksgiving Square, an ecumenical chapel in downtown Dallas, a check for \$116,000 was presented to Congressman Martin Frost.

While some immigrants, like the Asian Indians who assembled the day after 9/11 to express their support for the victims and their sense of belonging to the United States, have been only mildly inconvenienced by the events of 9/11, others have had their lives torn apart. In another part of the Dallas metropolitan area, three weeks after 9/11, a gas station/convenience storeowner from the Indian State of Gujarat named Vasodev Patel (a Hindu) was hard at work. A man walked in, expressed anger at what had happened in New York City, and shot and killed Mr. Patel. His wife Alka and two children were left to pick up the pieces. Several years later Alka still struggles, not only to keep the store afloat, working 15 hours a day 7 days a week, but also to raise her children without a father.

Soon after 9/11, a research project to study new immigration into the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area was launched.² A questionnaire, administered to 600 immigrants

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across five different immigrant populations (Asian Indians, Vietnamese, Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Nigerians) between 2003 and 2005, included the following question: 'How has the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 affected your position as an immigrant in the United States?' In this article I discuss some of the responses to this question. However, before addressing these data, I briefly review broader policy, behavioral, and attitudinal changes after 9/11 that have influenced the lives of US immigrants as well as shaped the debate on immigration reform during the spring and summer of 2006.

The Post 9/11 Immigrant Environment

In the years prior to the attacks of 9/11, the immigration debate primarily focused on the economic, fiscal, demographic, and cultural impact of the unprecedented level of immigration the United States has experienced in recent decades. While these issues will continue to be important, terrorism has now been added to the debate (Camarota 2002:44).

Several changes put into effect since 9/11 have affected the lives of immigrants in the United States. In the months immediately following the terrorist attack many thousands of undocumented workers, including individuals whose visas had expired, were rounded up, arrested, and deported. Increasingly, immigrant households in the U.S. are composed of individuals with different immigration and citizenship statuses and hence some families have been split apart as a result of some of these arrests and deportations. As borders have tightened many undocumented immigrants, largely Mexicans, have chosen not to take the risk of traveling to their home villages to visit their families because of the fear of not being able to reenter the US.

Perhaps better known is the policy implemented soon after 9/11 that required all adult males from specific, largely Muslim, countries to register at local immigration offices.

paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

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While this action failed to turn up terrorists, it too led to the deportation of many individuals who were out of visa status for one reason or another. It has also resulted, according to a report issued by the Migration Policy Institute (2003), in the progressive alienation of US Arab and Muslim communities and the weakening, rather than strengthening, of the relationship between these immigrants and their adopted country. Attorney General John Ashcroft called for non-citizens, all 17.8 million of them, to report changes of address within ten days of their movement. If they failed to do so, they too would face deportation and/or prosecution. While almost impossible to implement, this policy has led to further discomfort among legal immigrants in the United States. In view of all these activities, many people have come to the conclusion that the war on terrorism has been transformed into a war on immigrants and on those seeking political asylum. In their report "Securing Our Borders" Little and Klarreich (2005) argue that immigrants have become scapegoats—which they always have been during times of economic crisis but which they have now become in a time of heightened security.

More generally, immigration laws are being enforced more aggressively. Audits of places of work have increased to establish employer compliance on I-9 and H-1B visas. In several cities local police officers are engaged in a debate with immigration authorities about whether or not they should ask questions about immigration status when they arrest foreign nationals. The police have always argued that they do not want to enforce immigration laws because it might hamper their crime fighting efforts at the local level. People might be afraid to report crimes if they feel this will put them in jeopardy. Entry regulations have also been tightened. There are stricter background checks for visa applicants, fees have been raised, and the wait time for a visa is longer. The result has been a decline in the number of tourist and business visas issued.

Foreign students and refugees have also been impacted. Universities and schools have had to adopt tighter regulations. Between 2001 and 2003, the number of student visas

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declined by 26 percent. The number of refugees, particularly from countries like the Sudan and Somalia that have been linked to terrorism, has also declined (Orrenius 2003). In other words, immigration regulation in the post 9/11 world has affected all visa categories. This is in part a result of the realization that terrorists, even those who were involved in incidents prior to 9/11, have taken advantage of a host of visa categories for entry to the United States (Camarota 2002).

The 9/11 Commission's Final Report, released in July of 2004, includes several recommendations related to immigration. For example, it alludes to detectable false statements on visa applications as well as false statements made to broader officials. It refers to immigration laws that were violated once the perpetrators were in the US, including overstaying visas or not showing up at the schools that had issued them student visas. Among the recommendations in the report related to immigration were 1) the development of a more comprehensive screening system that might include biometric identifiers; 2) the integration of US border security; 3) more uniform standards for the issuance of birth certificates and drivers licenses; 4) addressing the illegal immigration issue; 5) bridging state and local law enforcement agencies into the mix on immigration control (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 2004).

In late summer of 2005 two reports highlighting the connection between immigration and national security were released. One, titled "Immigration and Terrorism; Moving Beyond the 9/11 Staff Report on Terrorist Travel", was authored by Janice Kephart, counsel for the 9/11 Commission (Kephart 2005). Like the 2002 report cited above, it points to the widespread terrorist violations of immigration laws and calls for much stricter enforcement. The second, titled "Keeping Extremists Out: The History of Ideological Exclusion and the Need for Its Revival" (Edwards 2005), calls for the restoration of policies that would allow aliens to be excluded or deported for overt acts as well as for radical affiliations or advocacy. 'At every stage of American history,' the author writes, 'immigration has exposed this nation to ideological

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threats. We should learn from our long experience and once again err in favor of American security' (Edwards 2005: 26).

Given this climate and the connections that fill reports such as those just cited, it is no wonder that immigrants themselves, no matter what their status, feel particularly vulnerable. Indeed, after 9/11 naturalization requests increased. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS; now United States Citizenship and Immigration Services- USCIS) reported that during the first eight months of the 2002 fiscal year (which began in October of 2001) naturalization applications were 65 percent higher than in the previous year. In the single month of May of 2002 the number of applications was 121 percent higher than in the previous year. And yet despite the increase in applications the approval process has become much slower.

The vulnerability that immigrants feel is reinforced by national polls that demonstrate that the response of Americans to immigrants is mixed. A New Jersey poll released on July 4, 2002 (The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers poll) showed that people had become more opposed to immigration as a result of 9/11.³ But it also showed that while in the abstract respondents opposed current immigration policies and want it reduced, on a day-to-day basis they see no problem with individuals with whom they have contact in their own neighborhoods. In this survey 59 percent of New Jersey residents thought that current immigration levels should be decreased—and of these 24 percent thought it should be stopped entirely. Fifty-two percent said they were more opposed to immigration now (in 2002) than before the attacks while only 38 percent said that the attacks had no effect on their attitudes. Fifty-six percent of respondents recommended reducing immigration levels for Middle Easterners in particular, and 21 percent of these wanted Middle Eastern

³ This poll is available online under the Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll, Eagleton Institute of Politics (<http://slerp.rutgers.edu>). Clearly such polls are time sensitive. Polls taken in the spring of 2006 as immigration reform has heated up on Capitol Hill yield different responses.

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immigration stopped altogether. But when asked about the impact of recent immigration on local life, the majority saw very little effect. Nearly two-thirds stated that recent immigrants have not had much effect on job opportunities, crime, or the quality of life in general.

In a telephone survey conducted in DFW in the fall of 2004, we asked a series of questions about immigration. There were 500 foreign-born respondents and 500 native born respondents. Of the foreign born, 318 (63.6%) were from Mexico, 36 (7.2%) from India, 18 (3.6%) from China (excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan), 17 (3.4%) from El Salvador, and the rest (in totals of 11 down to 1) were from a range of countries (22.2%). The native born were asked if they considered themselves white, African-American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian American, or some other ethnic background. Of the 500 native-born respondents, 375 (75%) said they were white, 62 (12.4%) African American, 51 (10.2%) Hispanic or Latino, 5 (1%) Asian, and 6 (1.2 %) of some other ethnic background. One respondent declined to give his/her ethnicity. Respondents were asked to place their responses to the question on a scale from 1-5 with 1 indicating that the statement did not correspond at all with what they thought to 5 where it corresponded exactly to what they thought.

The responses from the foreign born are included in Table 1 and those for native-born in Table 2. Not surprisingly the native born expressed much more concern about or ambivalence toward immigration than did the foreign-born and yet the responses do not reflect a strong anti-immigrant sentiment. If one looks at the proportion who answered 4 or 5 to the questions (closer to the statement matching what they think 'exactly'), the native born recognize that immigrants contribute to the growth of the local economy (46.2%); they bring skills and talents to the city (50.6%); and they offer cheap labor (54.8%). Just under 50 percent also see immigrants strengthening American culture and only 23 percent leaned strongly toward the view that immigrants take more than they contribute. They did not perceive immigrants as contributing significantly to crime nor to the burden on public services. However, all this said, almost 41 percent of the

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native born expressed disagreement with the idea of admitting more legal immigrants in the coming years.

Table 1: Foreign Born (N=500) responses to questions on attitudes toward immigration (as a % of the total responses) (1=Not at All; 5=Exactly)

	1	2	3	4	5	No Opinion	Refused
Immigrants strengthen American Culture	6.8	8.4	20.2	19.2	36.8	7.8	0.8
Immigrants generally take more than they contribute to the American economy	49.2	13.6	14.6	7.0	9.6	5.2	0.8
In the next ten years, the government should admit more legal immigrants	5.8	7.2	18.8	16.2	43.4	7.8	0.8
There is a great deal of discrimination against immigrants in the US	8.2	11.6	16.6	16.6	42.4	3.6	1.0
The growth of the immigrant population in the DFW area is a good thing	2.6	3.4	19.2	22.2	48.2	3.8	0.6
Immigrants make the city's economy grow	1.4	3.4	13.4	19.6	60.2	1.4	0.6
Immigrants bring lots of skills and talents to the city	2.6	3.4	17.4	21.8	51.2	3.0	0.6
Immigrants bring lots of cheap, low-wage labor to the city	6.0	5.0	15.4	12.4	58.0	2.6	0.6
Immigrants are a burden on public services	42.2	21.0	17.2	7.4	6.4	5.0	0.8
Immigrants cause a lot of crime	29.6	29.6	22.2	7.0	6.0	4.6	1.0

(DFW Telephone Survey, Fall 2004)

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Table 2: Native born (N=500) responses to questions on attitudes toward immigration (as a % of the total responses; 1=Not at All; 5=Exactly)

	1	2	3	4	5	No Opinion	Refused
Immigrants strengthen American Culture	11.2	11.2	27.8	22.2	25.0	2.4	0.2
Immigrants generally take more than they contribute to the American economy	31.4	21.8	20.0	9.6	13.4	3.8	0.0
In the next ten years, the government should admit more legal immigrants	23.2	17.6	26.8	13.8	16.0	2.4	0.2
There is a great deal of discrimination against immigrants in the US	17.0	11.8	30.2	20.8	17.4	2.8	0.0
The growth of the immigrant population in the DFW area is a good thing	10.0	15.2	35.4	19.0	18.2	1.8	0.4
Immigrants make the city's economy grow	9.8	12.6	28.4	23.6	22.6	2.6	0.4
Immigrants bring lots of skills and talents to the city	8.0	10.2	28.6	30.0	20.6	2.2	0.4
Immigrants bring lots of cheap, low-wage labor to the city	7.0	8.6	26.6	23.8	31.0	2.6	0.4
Immigrants are a burden on public services	23.8	24.0	25.6	11.8	11.6	3.0	0.2
Immigrants cause a lot of crime	31.6	33.0	19.6	5.8	6.6	3.2	0.2

(DFW Telephone Survey, Fall 2004)

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This latter question, the question about the growth of the immigrant population in the DFW area being a good thing, and the question stating that immigrants make a city's economy grow generated the greatest disparities between the native born and the foreign born. Almost 60 percent of the foreign born supported the admission of more legal immigrants in the next ten years (compared with just under 30 percent of the native born). Over 70 percent of the foreign born (compared with only 37 percent of the native born) thought that the growth of immigration in DFW was a good thing. Close to 80 percent of the foreign born (compared with 46 percent of the native born) tended to agree that immigrants make the city's economy grow.

For immigrants themselves the reality of America has changed. While many of the interviewees in the DFW study shrugged off the question about 9/11, saying it had not affected them personally, there were others who acknowledged an impact, whether directly or indirectly, whether concrete or more elusive. Several noted a general suspicion of immigrants in the months immediately following 9/11, while others pointed to a specific impact on people from the Middle East, but not on them. Several commented that it had made travel more difficult. But there were responses that illustrate some common themes. It is to these that I now turn.

'It makes me feel that the country is not safe'

Many immigrants and refugees come to the U.S. looking for a way of life that is more peaceful and secure. 9/11 shattered some of these dreams of safe haven. As one Nigerian put it, "If the U.S. isn't secure, what place is secure?" A Salvadoran commented that she felt like she was back in El Salvador where she saw people being murdered. The feeling of being robbed of a sense of security was most strongly voiced by Vietnamese immigrants, many who came to the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s to escape the harshness of the communist regime.

"I grew up in a war zone. The attack made me think about my childhood. But how could something like this happen here, in such a powerful country? I can understand war and violence

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in a poor weak country like Vietnam. But why here in a powerful country like the U.S.?"

In the period immediately after the attack Asian Indians were particularly worried about their safety because they were not sure that Americans could distinguish them from Arabs or that they understood about their dress. Women chose not to wear their saris and salwar kameezs in public. Reported one female respondent: "It was scary; people were telling us not to wear Indian clothes to go out because people might hurt us. There were Indians who were killed. People also told us not to wear the red dot." A male respondent remembered going down to pick up the mail in the complex where he lived and someone had stuck up a notice saying 'foreigners go home'.

That was unsettling. But at the same time there was a tall man in the grocery store who said to me 'you are Indian, right?' I nodded and he said that he wanted to apologize ahead of time for all the people who would think me Middle Eastern.

Indian Muslims were especially distressed:

It has made it more difficult for me to come out and say that I am a Muslim. Sometimes I embrace the opportunity but I have to be careful. I have to explain to people that the people who did this are extremists, just like those who kill abortion doctors. They are doing crazy things and trying to justify it..... There are US people who think that Islam is a religion that tells people to commit suicide. It was much easier before 9/11. There was general discrimination but now it is targeted and there is this fear of outsiders and of people who look different.

This sentiment was also voiced by Nigerian Muslims, although several admitted that Americans could distinguish them from Arabs because they were decidedly African in appearance.

The second observation made by Indians was about terrorism more generally. They noted that they have lived with this kind of violence in their own country and now perhaps Americans would better understand what it means. But at

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the same time they acknowledged that they had come to the US to escape the terrorism with which they grew up.

It was a humbling thing but I was never afraid. The benefit is that terrorism is now a global issue. India has been dealing with terrorism for years and it was a local issue. But now that it has hit the US it has become global.

Another respondent offered some advice. "Terrorism comes from frustration so you have to work to help people, to create liberties, to change the structure. That is the way you will stop it." Even Nigerians commented on their familiarity with the oppression that breeds terrorism. "We grew up with that...Muslim fundamentalism is common in one part of our country."

'Now you need a good social security card!'

The second biggest concern among immigrants was the impact of 9/11 on the US economy. Indeed this impact was probably heightened because of the prosperity of the 1990s – the higher you are, the harder you fall. Many Indians came to the area in the 1990s on H-1B visas to fuel the booming technology industries. But as the years after 9/11 progressed and the technology bubble burst many lost their jobs. Some had no alternative but to return to their home country. Others were simply left looking for work elsewhere. A Vietnamese respondent had this to say.

The attack damaged the American economy and caused a recession. Because of this I lost my job with Nokia and we lost a lot of money, and can no longer afford health insurance. I have to act as the doctor for my family, because we cannot afford to go to the doctor. I blame the terrorists for hurting the American economy, and thereby hurting me and my family.

Salvadorans and Mexicans were particularly concerned about the impact on employment as well as on their ability to even find work because papers are now more carefully scrutinized. Said one Mexican: "The economy has deteriorated. Many people are left with no jobs. Before the towers fell you could find work anywhere. Now you have to have a

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good social security card." A Salvadoran woman reinforced this assessment. "Employment is down, factories are closing. After that day, my son lost a job working as an electrician when the company closed." Another Salvadoran noted that some jobs are now closed to non-US citizens. He said he had wanted to apply for a job installing security systems in the airport. He met all the qualifications but because he was not a citizen he could not have the job. A Mexican respondent who arrived after 9/11 observed that those who came before were able to find work. "When I arrived there was this check of documents. [They were] much more exacting (*mas requisitos*)." Many Mexicans felt that they were being viewed as and treated like terrorists.

Immigrants have aggressively entered the small business sector and they too have felt the economic impact of 9/11. In the year after 9/11, for example, those in the travel business whose revenues derive to a large extent from arranging travel for their countrymen to the homeland, witnessed a sharp decline in business which only gradually picked up as the distance from that day became longer. A Salvadoran woman who owns a salon said that her business had declined, particularly since the start of the war in Iraq. She noted that many of her Mexican friends and clients have returned to their country for the duration. A Mexican contractor said that after 9/11 his building contracts dwindled. Before that date he had fifteen workers and at the time of the interview he could only afford to employ six. Asian Indian entrepreneurs expressed similar concerns. One reported having to lay off five employees. After 9/11, he observed, people just stopped spending. A Nigerian entrepreneur reported that his import/export business has been all but impossible. "I cannot tell you how long it takes to get the simplest shipments like cassava into the country. They check every little thing."

'I felt prouder to be an American'; and yet!

In their effort to raise funds for the American Red Cross the Indians in North Texas were trying to demonstrate their embrace of the United States and their patriotism. Other

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immigrants also commented that the events of 9/11 had stirred powerful feelings of identifying with America. One Vietnamese respondent who had served in the South Vietnamese army had this to say:

The attack made me very angry, nationalistic, and patriotic. I wanted to get back in my fighter and go attack the terrorists. I even called the USAF and volunteered to fight, but they said I was too old. Americans have a very short memory. Soon they will forget about the attack, but Al Qaeda has a long memory. They will strike again.

Another observed:

The people who did this are crazy fanatics. They have no morals. The attack made me more patriotic and made me want to support the government. We must be more attentive to national security. There is an old Vietnamese proverb that says--It is too late to close the gates (or make a fence) when the cows already have gotten out.

A Mexican immigrant said: "I always felt I was a Mexican. I was never patriotic toward the US. I would not put my hand on my heart when hearing the National Anthem. Seeing the response of others after 9/11 ignited a patriotism that I did not feel before." A Salvadoran said that 9/11 affected "his sense of belonging in the society." He reported feeling "more unified with other Americans." And a Nigerian put it this way: "The attack has not affected me as an immigrant, but as an American. I wondered what did I do for people to attack me like this? What should I be doing differently?"

Others noted that the events of 9/11 prompted them to become a citizen and thereby express loyalty to the United States. Some expressed concern about the openness of the United States. "I cried," said one Asian Indian woman.

I just thought about the goodness of this country. I do not want to see it happen again. This is a great nation but it has had troubles because of its goodness and leniency. Perhaps there would not have been this trouble if the US had not let so many people in.

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And yet there were those who readily criticized some of the policies of the US and viewed 9/11 as a wake-up call for Americans who choose to ignore the rest of the world. "There are things to be critical about," commented one Indian male.

The US government supported the overthrow of Allende in 1973 and a lot of people were massacred and there was no complaint. The US needs to see things from a global perspective. This is not to say that what happened on 9/11 was not horrible but Americans are so individualistic in their perception. They are also misinformed. There is not all this anti-Americanism out there. The actions are not the entire Muslim world. It is just some people using religion as a pedestal for politics.

In other words, some respondents expressed grave concerns about how 9/11 has distorted the American perception of Islam. Others put the event into a more global perspective. For example, one Vietnamese respondent said that although he feels sorry for those who lost their lives and for the families (he had made a contribution to the 9/11 fund) he nevertheless thought that the US had overreacted. "Look at what happened in Vietnam, where many more lives (millions) were lost. This war in Vietnam was a much greater tragedy for the people of Vietnam." A Nigerian noted that while immigrants feel sorry about the people who died and about the attack, they also recognize that the US has some culpability. "If you keep imposing selfish policies on the world, then what else can you expect?"

'There is a certain suspicion of immigrants'

By far the greatest concern was about the impact on immigration itself—the tightening of regulations that has affected all visa categories. It is harder to enter as a student, something that the Vietnamese are increasingly trying to do and that Indians and Nigerians have been doing for some time. It is harder to sponsor family members—the delays are exceedingly long. Said one Vietnamese respondent, "My mother tried to sponsor my brother to come here. It's been five years of paperwork and we still don't know when it will

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happen - especially now." Others have observed that it is harder for their relatives to get a tourist visa to attend a wedding in this country. A Nigerian said that his family has been refused visas every time they have applied. "There is a general mistrust of foreigners. That incident has ruined people's lives."

An Indian student who applied to come to the US soon after 9/11 reported the following experience.

I got a US visa reject on my first attempt to come here to study. But I was determined to come to US, so I applied for the second time, but still got rejected. Then I applied for the third time and thought this would be my last attempt to do so.I was called for an interview and then they gave me the visa. I am still shocked as to why I got the visa rejected on the first two occasions. I had everything proper. But then I thought it might be due to September 11.

A Nigerian student reported that now at the end of each year he has to have documents confirmed and signed by university officials. If he leaves the state, he must inform officials of his whereabouts. There is a lot of trouble, he said, if he does not tell people he has changed his address or where he is going.

Some Hispanics noted how the events of 9/11 had put a halt on some changes in immigration legislation that were progressing—specifically the talks between George W. Bush and Vicente Fox about undocumented workers that were initiated early in 2001. Said one Mexican, "I had hopes that we would arrive at a more just immigration policy, but due to the attacks it has been delayed." Another said, "Bush abandoned the promises of amnesty that he had made and this has created disillusion among immigrants." Clearly these issues were put back on the table in the spring of 2006 and Hispanics across the country, legal and undocumented, responded with a loud voice. But it took five years for the US government to return to the discussion.

Some Salvadorans noted that the opportunities available to immigrants became more limited because both laws and attitudes had changed. One respondent said that this had

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particularly affected illegal immigrants. Indeed many noted that crossing the border takes more time and that documents are more carefully scrutinized. Many Mexicans said that they were not even trying to travel to Mexico because they feared not being able to return to the US. Said one Mexican, "Nothing has changed for me, but for my wife yes. She is undocumented and cannot return to Mexico without the risk of having complications to return to this country."

Respondents across all groups recognized that the attitudes toward immigrants/foreigners had changed, with heightened discrimination "against brown and black people." A Nigerian respondent commented, "The September 11th attack affected all foreigners. People no longer trust foreigners and we have no privacy. The government watches us all the time." A Salvadoran respondent observed that 9/11 has affected people from the Middle East the most, but also Latinos. "People are now more suspicious of immigrants, who are viewed as possible terrorists." Another Salvadoran observed that "People look at you differently, thinking that because you are an immigrant you might also be something else." An Indian respondent noted that he was most afraid of hate crime. "Whenever you are a minority somewhere you are blamed for things that go wrong." Several noted that their rights were being limited and some commented that they had moved forward toward citizenship because they feared the anti-immigrant hostility.

Conclusion

Several years have passed since the events of 9/11, 2001. Most people, native and foreign born, have stored the horrors of that day deep in their memory and do not confront it on a daily basis as they did in the immediate aftermath. But it is not entirely forgotten for it marks a political and economic turning point for the United States. As Mattingly, Lawlor and Jacobs-Huey (2002:743) have argued, the September 11 tragedy is "an astonishing and unthinkable breach....In public discourse and for many Americans personally, it has split time into a "before" and "after." "

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For immigrants in particular the country changed, both as it was and is imagined, and as it is lived. Immigration reform is back on the table but the debate is not only about numbers (how to solve the problem of the large pool of undocumented workers), but also very much about political and economic security. As recent reports indicate, it is also about national belonging, rights, and citizenship—all issues of deep concern to the foreign born who, no matter where they originate from, may feel a little less sure about their future in the so-called nation of immigrants.

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